

The recent debate regarding the validity of the story of Hezekiah Wyman has helped me understand how to approach the story of “Molly Pitcher.” There is wide debate whether Molly Pitcher actually existed or whether she was a composite character, as more than one woman filled that role. Indeed camp followers were the norm during the Revolutionary War and it is not a far stretch that some would have fetched water during long protracted battles. What we know however, is that among these women there were two who particularly distinguished themselves for putting down their pitcher and joining in the fight. Those two women were Mary Hays McCauley, interred at Carlisle, PA; and Margaret Corbin interred at West Point, NY. The focus of this presentation will be the facts I have been able to glean regarding Mary Hays story.

At my first Apple Seed as an instructor this spring, ATM agreed to let me tell the story of Mary Hays McCauley to the group collected. I worked mostly from memory and snippets from Wikipedia collected on the spot. I determined that before the year was out I would document what I knew more thoroughly. I have just returned from a trip which included Battle Road, the Springfield Armory, Carlisle Barracks and the cemetery at Carlisle, PA.

I first came across the story of Mary “Molly Pitcher” Hays while a student at the Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA. The Carlisle Barracks History Museum at the Hessian Powder Magazine includes a presentation about Mary; the content which is transcribed below.

Her story intrigued me so I have delved further and the documentation as well as pertinent photographs which I provide here for your use.

Transcribed from the History of Carlisle Barracks Museum; Hessian Powder Magazine, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

“Molly Pitcher

An Artillery wife, Mary Hays McCauley (better known as Molly Pitcher) shared the rigors of Valley Forge with her husband, William Hays. Her actions during the Battle of Monmouth on June 28th, 1778 became legendary. That day at Monmouth was as hot as Valley Forge was cold and someone had to cool the hot guns and quench the parched throats of soldiers with water.

Across that bullet-swept ground Mary Hays McCauley was earning her nickname “Molly Pitcher” by bringing pitcher after pitcher of cool spring water to the exhausted and thirsty men. She also tended to the wounded and once, heaving a crippled Continental Soldier up on her strong back, carried him out of the reach of hard-charging British Infantry. On her next trip with water, she found her artilleryman husband back with the guns again, replacing a fallen casualty. While she watched, Hays fell wounded. The artillery piece, its crew too depleted to serve it, was about to be withdrawn. Without hesitation, Molly stepped forward and took the rammer staff from her fallen husband. For the second time on an American battlefield, a woman manned the gun. (The first was Margaret Corbin during the defense of Fort Mifflin in 1776). Resolutely, she stayed at her post in the face of heavy enemy fire, ably acting as a matross (gunner).

For her heroic role, General Washington himself issued her a warrant as a noncommissioned officer. Thereafter she was widely hailed as “Sergeant Molly.” In 1822 the Pennsylvania Legislature passed an act “for the relief of Molly McKolly”, for her services during the Revolutionary War. She was awarded \$40.00 and the same amount to be paid annually during

her lifetime. A flagstaff, cannon, and bronze statue of Molly stand at her gravesite in Carlisle, Pennsylvania where she died on January 22, 1832."

From the Plaque at the gravesite monument of Mary Hays McCauley:

"Mary Ludwig Hays ("Molly Pitcher") accompanied her husband during his service in the continental army and rendered valuable service in the capacity of an Army Nurse and by reason of her many acts of kindness became known throughout the Army from the oft-repeated expression "Here comes Molly and her pitcher," as Molly Pitcher."

At the Battle of Monmouth, June 28, 1778, Sergeant John Hays was severely wounded and as he fell to the ground Molly sprang to the cannon he had been serving, which cannon had been ordered to the rear, but before the gun could be withdrawn she had taken her husband's place and rendered such valiant service that General George Washington after the battle thanked her personally for her bravery and heroic action."

A poem from the same Plaque at the gravesite monument of Mary Hays McCauley:

"Molly Pitcher" (Mary Hays)

O'er Monmouth's field of carnage drear
With cooling drink and words of cheer,
A woman passed who knew no fear,
The wife of Hays, the gunner.
With ramrod from her husband's hand,
Beside his gun she took her stand
And helped to wrest our well-loved land
From England's tyrant king.
From the ranks this woman came,
By the cannon won her fame;
'tis true she could not write her name
But freedom's hand hath carved it.
Shall we than criticize her ways?
Nay, rather give her well-earned praise,
Then doff our caps and voices raise
In cheers for Molly Pitcher.

Sarah Woods Parkinson"

From Martin, Joseph Plumb, *A Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier*, Signet Classics, 2001; previously published as *Private Yankee Doodle*, publisher unknown; Pg 114-115.

Joseph Plumb Martin's description of the Battle of Monmouth:

"One little incident happened during the heat of the cannonade, which I was eye-witness to, and which I think would be unpardonable not to mention. A woman whose husband belonged to the Artillery, and who was then attached to a piece in the engagement, attended with her husband at the piece the whole time; while in the act of reaching a cartridge and having one of her feet as far before the other as she could step, a cannon shot from the enemy passed directly between her legs without doing any other damage than carrying away all the lower part of her petticoat, - looking at it with apparent unconcern, she observed, that it was lucky it did not pass a little

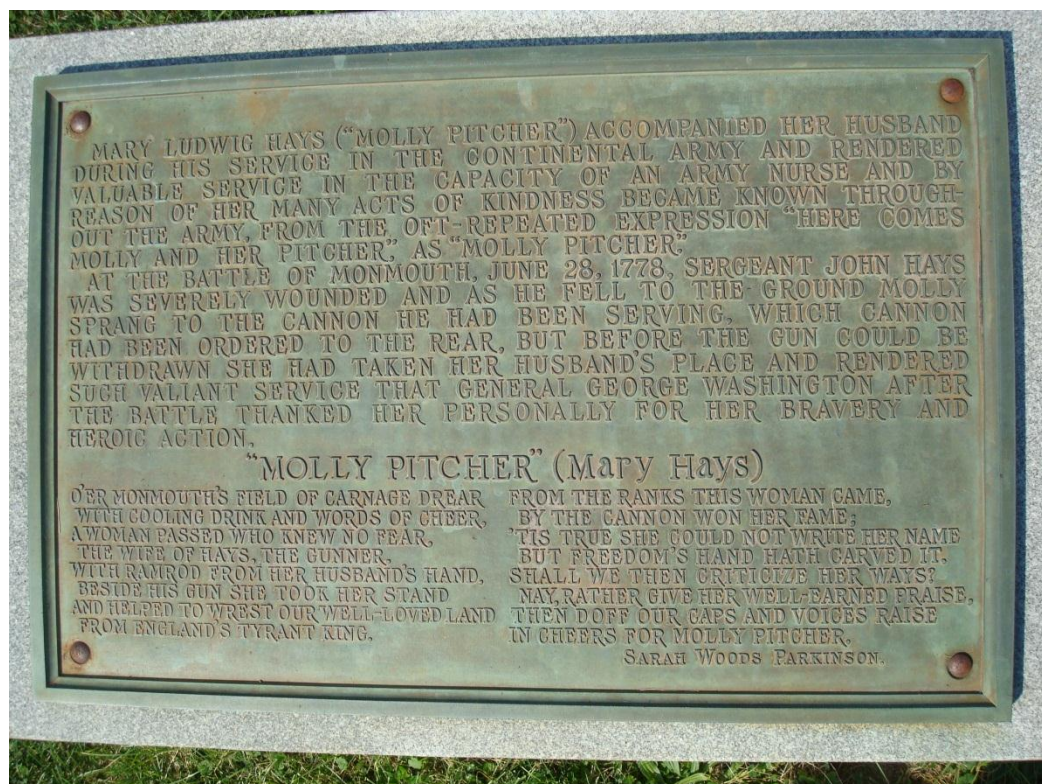
higher, for in that case it might have carried away something else, and ended her and her occupation.”



Molly Pitcher Monument, Carlisle, PA.



Close up photographs of artistic plates on the Molly Pitcher Monument, Carlisle, PA.



Close up shots of tablets in front of Molly Pitcher Monument, Carlisle, PA



Mollie McCauly Grave Marker behind Molly Pitcher Monument, Carlisle, PA.

Inscription:

MCCAULY, Mollie, Renowned in History as Mollie PITCHER. The Heroine Of Monmouth. D Jan 1832, Aged 79 Years. Erected by the citizens of Cumberland Co. July 4-1876.

Source of inscription text now unreadable:

<http://files.usgwarchives.net/pa/cumberland/cemeteries/carlogy01.txt>; last accessed 29Sep14

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sharon1@cfl.rr.com

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Copyrighted in 1930 was a book "Memories of Carlisle's Old Graveyard" published by Mary Kirtley Lamberton, and written by Sarah Woods Parkinson, our Grandmother.

We, the descendants, in the interest of genealogy, acknowledge that the information contained in this book could be of great value to many persons. Therefore, we feel that the contents of this book should be put into public domain.

Elizabeth Winifred Hoffman

Helen Parkinson Moore

William Sterrett Parkinson